

THE FREE-ASSOCIATION TEST

A free-association test was carefully constructed according to the following rules:

1. Most of the stimulus words shall readily allow of both (1) predicate and definitive and (2) coordinate and contrast responses.

For example: the stimulus "violet" readily permits such predicate responses as "flower," "nice," etc., or such coordinate responses as "pansy," "rose," etc.

2. Most of the stimulus words shall be common, simple words; but scattered among these simple words shall be a certain number of harder, less common words.

Responses indicating comprehension of these harder words are favorable in the diagnosis of intelligence.

3. Words which are likely to call forth one or two common associates closely bound to the stimulus by verbal habit, shall be avoided.

Such stimulus words obviously evoke a uniform, rather than a diagnostic reaction.

4. Stimulus words shall be avoided which, either in themselves or through their probable associates, cause emotional disturbance, or inhibit the freedom of association.

Of course the emotional disturbance depends in part upon the individual subject; but a word like "sex," or "fear," or "leprosy" is obviously more likely to produce 'blocking' than is "paper," or "walk," or "pupil," etc.

5. Slang words shall be excluded.

6. Words with two or more distinctly different meanings shall be avoided.

For example, "saw" (noun and verb); "fine" (adjective and noun); etc.

7. Words with more than eight letters shall be excluded.

The purpose of this is to minimize, in the adult subject, any initial appearance of difficulty or erudition in the stimulus words.



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AND THE MEASUREMENT OF
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BY

HERBERT S. CONRAD AND DANIEL HARRIS

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HERBERT S. CONRAD AND DANIEL HARRIS

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INTRODUCTION

Unselected adults are, in general, decidedly averse to submitting to an ordinary intelligence test. ⁽²⁾ Furthermore, even if the adults are willing to be examined, it is usually difficult or expensive to bring them together for purposes of group-testing. Imagine, for instance, the difficulty of congregating all the adult first cousins of the children of a school population! Such a sample, however, might well be reached by mail—if only we had an intelligence test sufficiently novel and interesting to supply adequate motivation for response, and sufficiently disguised and

¹ For the stimulation of our interest in the field represented by this study, we wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to Professor Harold E. Jones, Director of Research at the Institute of Child Welfare of the University of California. We also take pleasure in acknowledging the assistance of Dr. Alexander Eichandler, the principal of the school in which the test results were obtained.

personal to prevent consultation or cheating. With these thoughts in mind, a free-association test was constructed by the senior author.

Mention has often been made of the relation between intelligence and the types of response evoked by a free-association test. The reports of various investigators upon this question have, to be sure, sometimes failed to agree; owing apparently to disparities in sampling, and to differences in procedure and lists of stimulus words. The main qualitative findings of these investigators, however, may be very briefly summarized as follows: As age and intelligence increase, subjects tend to respond with fewer predicates and definitions, and more opposites and coordinates;^(15, 17) in addition, a change from concreteness to abstractness is noted in response.^(15, 16, 18) These findings have in no instance been accompanied by a quantitative determination of the utility of a free-association test for the measurement of intelligence. The present experiment aims at such a determination. On the basis of certain a priori considerations and preliminary results (which need not here be discussed), we entertained a stronger hope in the possibilities of an association test than other investigators seemed willing to admit.

A valid free-association test would, it seems to us, fulfil most of the special requirements for the testing of adults who are averse to ordinary intelligence tests. The association test offers the subject a task more or less novel and agreeable; the intelligence-testing purpose of the task is certainly not obvious; and the task is sufficiently personal to discourage consultation or cheating. The simplicity of the directions for a free-association test is a final advantage making it admirably suited for distribution by mail, and self-administration by the subjects.